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SUBJECT: NEA A/S WELCH ASSISTANT SECRETARY MEETING WITH
ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) NEA A/S WELCH, ACCOMPANIED BY AMBASSADOR, MET MINISTER OF THE ROYAL OFFICE GENERAL ALI BIN MAJID AL-MA'AMARI ON DECEMBER 12 FOR A BRIEF EXCHANGE OF IDEAS ON REGIONAL ISSUES. THE VISIT, MOSTLY A COURTESY CALL ON ONE OF THE SULTAN'S MOST TRUSTED ADVISORS, FEATURED A HEALTHY DIALOGUE ON IRAQ. A/S WELCH NOTED THAT OMAN WAS A VALUED STRATEGIC PARTNER AND THAT THE PURPOSE OF HIS TRIP TO THE REGION WAS TO SOLICIT INPUT ON A VARIETY OF SUBJECTS. GENERAL ALI SAID THAT MORE THAN TWO YEARS AGO HE HAD MADE MANY OF THE SAME RECOMMENDATIONS THAT WERE IN THE RECENTLY RELEASED IRAQ STUDY GROUP REPORT. THE SITUATION HAD SINCE BECOME EVEN MORE DIFFICULT, BUT THE BOTTOM LINE FOR OMAN AND GCC STATES REMAINED THE FORMATION OF A UNIFIED, ARAB IRAQ FREE FROM SECTARIAN VIOLENCE. OMAN WAS NOT INTERESTED IN THE SUNNI VERSUS SHI'A DEBATE, GENERAL ALI REMARKED. THE SHI'A MUST REPRESENT ALL OF IRAQ IF THEY ARE IN POWER AND SUNNI ALIENATION AND SECURITY ISSUES MUST BE ADDRESSED.

12. (S/NF) GENERAL ALI THEN SWITCHED TRACK AND OFFERED AN UNSOLICITED COMMENTARY ON THE PACE OF DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN OMAN. HE NOTED THAT OMAN WAS PURPOSELY MOVING SLOWLY TO ENSURE THAT OMANIS WERE PREPARED FOR ALL OF THE POLITICAL FREEDOMS THEY WOULD EVENTUALLY BE GIVEN. OMAN HAD SEEN DEMOCRACY MOVE TOO FAST IN OTHER COUNTRIES WITH THE RESULT BEING POLITICAL INSTABILITY. GENERAL ALI STATED THAT OMAN INTENDED TO TAKE ONLY GRADUAL STEPS SO THAT THERE IS NO TURNING BACK ONCE THE SULTAN'S REFORM VISION HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED. HE ADDED THAT OMAN REGULARLY LOOKS AT DEMOCRATIC REFORMS, OR LACK OF REFORMS, IN OTHER GCC STATES, AND CONSIDERS ITSELF AHEAD OF ITS NEIGHBORS. MORE DETAILED REPORTING ON THIS MEETING IS BEING SUBMITTED IN SIMO CHANNELS. GRAPPO